

Benjamin Rush's Theatrical Therapeutics



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Medical Inquiries and Observations, Upon the Disease of the Mind (1812)

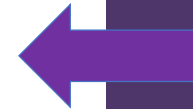
A notice to the readers...

The reader will excuse my frequent references to the poets for facts to illustrate the history of madness. They view the human mind in all its operations, whether natural or morbid, with a microscopic eye ; and hence many things arrest their attention, which escape the notice of physicians.

Incorporation of Shakespeare

ly pain. Can any thing be anticipated more dreadful than universal madness? and yet I once attended a lady in this city, whose sufferings from low spirits were of such a nature, that she ardently wished she might lose her reason, in order thereby to be relieved from the horror of her thoughts. This state of mind was not new in this disease. Shakspeare has described it in the following lines, in his inimitable history of all the forms of derangement, in the tragedy of King Lear. They are as truly philosophical, as they are poetical.

——— “Better I were distract;
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs,
And woes, by wrong imaginations, lose
The knowledge of themselves.”



Theatrical Therapeutics

If our patient imagine he has a living animal in his body, and he cannot be reasoned out of a belief of it, medicines must be given to destroy it; and if an animal, such as he supposes to be in his body, should be secretly conveyed into his close stool, the deception would be a justifiable one, if it served to cure him of his disease.

Theatrical Therapeutics

2. In the year 1803 I visited a young gentleman in our hospital, who became deranged from remorse of conscience in consequence of killing a friend in a duel. His only cry was for a pistol, that he might put an end to his life. I told him, the firing of a pistol would disturb the patients in the neighbouring cells, and that the wound made by it would probably cover his cell with blood, but that I could take away his life in a more easy and delicate way, by bleeding him to death, from a vein in his arm, and retaining his blood in a large bowl. He consented at once to my proposal. I then requested Dr. Hartshorn, the resident physician and apothecary of the hospital, to tie up his arm, and bleed him to death. The Doctor instantly obeyed this request. After losing nearly twenty ounces of blood, he fainted, became calm, and slept soundly the ensuing night.

Thanks!

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